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**SCHAKOWSKY, DAVIS: 36,000 CHICAGO AREA VETERANS TO LOSE HEALTH CARE
OR BE FORCED OUT OF VA SYSTEM
UNDER PRESIDENT BUSH PLAN**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Danny Davis (D-IL) today warned that veterans across Illinois would suffer under President Bush's proposed budget. A report released by the Democratic staff of the Government Reform Committee concluded that the changes would cause:

"over 65,000 Illinois veterans, including an estimated 36,000 veterans enrolled at VA facilities in the Chicago area, to be denied VA health care or to drop out of the VA system, while increasing costs for thousands more." "It is unimaginable that a plan to reduce veterans' benefits would even be contemplated at a time when hundreds of thousands of active duty soldiers are risking their lives in Iraq. Despite all the enthusiastic and well deserved praise of our troops, the reality is that their future well being is jeopardized by the Bush budget cuts. It's time for the Bush Administration to put its money where its mouth is. This action by the Bush Administration is completely unacceptable," Schakowsky said.

"To reduce services for veterans while we are engaged in military action is incomprehensible. This is a terrible message that we are sending to our soldiers as we send them off to fight and risk their lives, without having the assurance that when they return, (if they return) adequate medical and other services will be available and accessible to them," Davis stated.

First, President Bush would halt enrollment to Priority 8 veterans, denying them access to any VA care. The report found that as a result of this proposed suspension, 173,000 veterans nationwide would be denied care, including 7,160 in Illinois of which 4,000 are in the Chicago area.

Second, President Bush would require the VA to charge all Priority 7 and Priority 8 veterans currently in the system a \$250 annual enrollment fee in order to receive service. As a result of the fee, the VA estimates that 55% of enrolled Priority 7 and Priority 8 veterans would be forced to drop out of the VA system nationwide, including 32,000 veterans in the Chicago area.

Finally, a third set of provisions would increase co-payments for Priority 7 and Priority 8 veterans who do stay enrolled in the VA program. The co-payments for primary care payments would increase by 33%, from \$15 per visit to \$20 per visit. The co-payments for prescription drugs would more than double, increasing from \$7 to \$15 per 30-day prescription. On average, the report concluded, veterans would have to pay an additional \$97 a year in co-payments plus the new enrollment fee of \$250. However, many veterans can see an increase of almost \$600 a year.

□ **Priority 8 veterans are veterans who do not have service-related disabilities and, in the Chicago area, have an annual income level of \$38,100 or more.□ Priority 7 veterans also do not have service-related disabilities, but their annual income level is between \$24,644 and \$38,100 for a single veteran.**

□ **Chicago area veterans receive care at the North Chicago, Lakeside, and West Side VA medical centers, at the Hines VA Hospital, and at smaller clinics located in Evanston, Oak Park, Beverly, and Chicago Heights.**